Unbegotten Child

Winston K. Marks

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"That," she demanded, sitting bolt upright in the hospital bed, "has happened to the medical world? In Italy, they tell me I have an abdominal tumor. In Paris, it's cancer. And now you fat-heads are trying to tell me I'm pregnant!"

I stuffed my stethoscope into my jacket pocket and tried to pat her hand. "Take it easy, Mrs. Caffey—"

"It's *Miss Caffey*, damn you," she said snatching her hand away, "and better I should have gone to an astrologer!"

"See here, now," I said, letting a stern note enter my voice. "You came here requesting a verification of the malignancy of this growth. Our discovery of a six month foetus is a fact, not an accusation."

"Look, Buster, I'm a thirty-six-year-old spinster. Like the joke goes, I haven't been married *or anything*. Also, I knew about the birds and the bees before you were emptying bedpans. Now will you get off this subject of babies and find out whether it's safe for me to start any continued stories?"

Such protestations from unmarried mothers were not uncommon, but Sara Caffey's cold convictions were unshakable. She sank back into her seven satin pillows and sighed mightily. Her wide-spaced, intelligent eyes glared at me from a handsome, if somewhat overly strong, face. Creamy white shoulders swept gracefully into gradually darkening neck skin and frankly tanned cheeks and broad forehead. Her straight, slender nose was sunburned.

As resident physician for over fifteen years, I had learned patience in these matters. But the thought that this lovely creature expected me to believe that she was an unfulfilled old maid got under my skin, particularly under the circumstances.

"Miss Caffey, I am a physician, not a philosopher. Just the same, permit me to congratulate you on your virginity."

"Thanks," she said, in a voice not untinged with pride.

"However," I went on, "in spite of certain contra-indications and irregularities of symptoms such as the absence of morning sickness and the like, I would like to enlist your cooperation in delivering yourself of an infant within the next three months."

"Dr. Foley, please understand!" She threw her hands apart in despair. "I love children. I would have an acre of them if I were married, or even in the mood for any other alliance. But men just don't fit my frame of reference. And regardless of what kind of a

damned fool I may make of myself in the future, I haven't, to date! Doctor, the kind of cooperation you ask for hasn't been known for two thousand years."

I tried another tack. "Well, since you arrived without a medical history on your condition, would you tell us the name of your last doctor so we may write for a transcript?"

"Phillipe Sansome, in Paris."

"The surgeon?"

She nodded. "And don't try to explain that he misdiagnosed because he's hungry for surgical fees. He didn't plan to operate. In fact, that's why I left. He was trying some new cure of his own that didn't set well with the staff there, and they got into such a squabble I figured I'd better remove the cause of it all before the dear old man lost his license."

While she was speaking, I casually drew back the covers and exposed her slightly swollen abdomen. It, too, had a surprising coat of tan. I donned my stethoscope, moved the diaphragm around until I had what I wanted, and held it there.

"Yes, I know of Dr. Sansome," I told her. "We shall send a wire at once for your case record. Helps, you know. Now, if you will just slip these into your ears—"

She let me hang the stethoscope around her neck, and even brushed back her shining black hair so I could adjust the ear-pieces for her.

"If Doctor Sansome had heard that," I said, "he would have changed his mind."

She listened intently to the quick, light, foetal heartbeat for over a minute, and gradually a faraway gleam lighted her eyes. "Oh if you were only right," she said softly, "Here I've chased stories all over the globe half my life, and I'd have the biggest story since the flood right here in my own tummy!"

She lay back again. "But of course, you're wrong."

"Then what do you call the sounds you've just heard?" I said in complete exasperation.

"Gut rumble," she said. "Now go along like a nice intern and find me a passel of surgeons and let's have at this tumor, cancer, bubble-gum or what have you. I want out of here, fast as I can mend."

There was no reason to keep the female news-correspondent in bed, but she wouldn't stir. She was confident that Phillipe Sansome's

findings would convince us. Three days passed with no word from Paris. Then, on the fourth day, her medical history arrived in the briefcase of the famous surgeon himself.

"I flew," he apologized, "but it took two days to detach myself. Delighted to meet you, Dr. Foley. Your cable mentioned a Miss Sara Caffey, maternity patient. Is it *possible*?"

He was large for a Frenchman, and his gauntness was compounded by an obvious lack of sleep. His black eyes bore into mine as if to drag out what appeared to me to be a fairly mundane admission.

"We call her that," I said shrugging. "And as to her condition, you may examine her yourself."

"*Sacre bleu!*" His eyes rolled up like bloodshot cue-balls. "She left us at her own insistence. Aside from ethics, we must not disturb her by my reappearance. But I have a favor to ask. A giant mountain of a fantastic favor. Now that I have found her again, I must not lose her, certainly not, until—"

He grabbed pen and paper and moved his chair to my desk. He wrote briefly. "*Voila!* These simple adjustments in her metabolism—diet, and just a few so petite injections. And may I remain here in the behind-ground, incognito? I will help with other work—at no cost, of course. I will be an orderly, if you will. But I must remain in touch. Close touch."

I was a bit nonplussed. A man of Sansome's reputation! It was like a United States Senator pleading for the opportunity to scrub out the men's room at the House of Representatives. Just the same, I wouldn't be stampeded or overawed. Several provocative explanations for the French doctor's concern came to mind… . Was he the repudiated father of Sara's unborn child? Or was he a practitioner of artificial insemination, with a rather unfortunate error to his credit?

"Your request is unusual," I said cautiously, "but not entirely unreasonable. In order to justify it, I am sure you will be willing to explain your interest in this case, will you not, Doctor?"

He frowned, "I suppose I must. But you will believe little of it. My own staff agreed with my diagnosis, but they violently rejected my theory. Wait until they hear *your* diagnosis, doctor!" He unzipped his briefcase. "She probably protests that she has a malignant tumor, not a baby," he remarked as he laid thick sheafs of paper on my desk.

"You are so very right," I said.

"Madamoiselle is magnificent," he observed, running slender,

wrinkled hands through his sparse gray hair. "But her obstinacy will not avail against evolution. No more than we doctors' monumental ignorance."

"Evolution? Explain, please."

"Here is the case history." He drummed on it with his short-clipped nails. "In it, you will find that Caffey came to us three months ago with her body cavity in the grasp of a small octopus of a soft form carcinoma. The pain reached from pelvis to chest."

"Incredible!" I exclaimed.

Sansome spread his hand on the record sheets. "Facts are never incredible," he reminded me gently. "What follows, however, will tax your credulity, and I beg of you to allow me to impose an outrageous concept whose only virtue appears to be its demonstrated validity."

"Proceed."

"In forty years of slicing away tumerous growths, I had become morbid at the dreadful incidence of recurrence and the obscene mortality rate. In spite of all our techniques, these cancers have increased with the persistence of Nature herself.

"In a fit of prolonged depression brought on by a foolishly strenuous research of histories, my mind stumbled into a stupid preoccupation with a few isolated cases of exogenic pregnancy. One which fascinated me was the young 17-year-old boy from whose lung a surgeon removed a live three-month foetus. Somehow the obvious explanation refused to satisfy me. It was, of course, concluded that the foetus was an undeveloped twin to the boy himself.

"This *could* be so; but on what facts was this assumption based? None. Only the absence of any other theory justified the concept. The surgeon had expected to find a hard carcinoma.

"And it came to me suddenly that *he had found his cancer*!

"My interpolation was this: Mankind is suffering an evolutionary change in his reproductive procedure. The high incidence of various tumors evidences Nature's experiments in developing a asexual reproduction."

Sansome's statement so flabbergasted me that I looked at him for signs of facetiousness or irrationality. His extreme fatigue was evident —but his calmness and clarity of self-expression in a foreign language indicated no mental confusion. A hoax of such magnitude was outside the realm of possibility for a surgeon of his distinction.

The man was simply following a blind alley of reasoning, set off by

his life-long frustration of battling cancer.

I mustered my patience and drew him out, hoping he would find a contradiction in his own theory.

"This is a rather staggering notion, Dr. Sansome," I said. "Have you been able to support it with—additional evidence?"

"Until Miss Caffey," he said, "frankly, no. Not the kind of evidence that is acceptable. But the theory has much to defend it. In your own Journal of the A. M. A., May 7, 1932, Dr. Maud Slye published the first solid evidence that predisposition to so-called malignant tumor is hereditary. Is this not a better characteristic of a true mutation, rather than of a disease?"

"Perhaps," I said. "But how does Mother Nature justify the desirability of a change from our present rather successful bisexual system? And isn't she being rather cruel in her methods? Think of the millions she has made suffer in her experiments."

"Mother Nature," Sansome pronounced positively, "is neither kind nor cruel. She is manifestly indifferent to all but the goal of survival of the species. Our civilization has set out to thwart her with increasingly more effective methods of birth-control. In the light of survival, Nature is most justified in trying to bring millions of frustrated, childless humans to parenthood.

"Meanwhile," he said, riffling the case history of Sara Caffey, "let us examine the evidence at hand. Our patient arrived in Paris positively cancerous. After confirming the diagnosis, I proposed an unprecedented treatment based on my theory. We know several body conditions which promote the rapid development of carcinoma, such as excess alkalinity and high blood sugar content and so forth. Instead of trying to reduce these and fight the tumor, I reversed the treatment and aided Miss Caffey's body to support and encourage its growth to what I predicted would be a new maturity.

"And what happened?" He threw up his hands. "In two months, the tendrils of the octopus withdrew into the central body of the tumor. The tendency to spread in search for attenuated nourishment was reversed with the treatment. This alone was an accomplishment, for it would have made the growth operable in a short time.

"Unfortunately, word of my unorthodox prescription reached a jealous colleague, and he set off such a quarrel at the Institute that Miss Caffey packed up and left with the generous misconception that she was saving me from embarrassment. I had no opportunity to assure her that the Cancer Institute would decide ultimately in my

favor—which it shall when I return with a photostat of a certain birth certificate."

He smiled for the first time, and his charm was so powerful that I sincerely wanted to believe in him. I could see no use in denying him his request, for his prescriptions were of an innocuous nature for a normally pregnant woman such as Sara Caffey. I trusted that a normal birth of a typical baby would finally dissuade him.

I extended my hand again. "You are most welcome to stay with us, doctor," I told him. "The treatment you desire is within reason, and I admire your tenacity with your theory. I hope you will forgive me, however, if I say that I find your premises rather tenuous. I feel that we will witness a very normal birth, and ultimately Miss Caffey will find it to her peace of mind to confess a secret marriage, or, at most—an alliance of which she may be pathologically ashamed at the moment."

Sansome grasped my hand with enthusiasm. "*Bien! Tres bien!*" he exclaimed. "This is more generous even than I expected. Certainly I do not expect a scientist of your station to swallow my theory at a gulp, Dr. Foley. I will admit that my persistence depends more than it should on intuition. But we shall see. I am grateful to you." And he kissed me firmly on each cheek.

A study of Sansome's carefully prepared case history on Sara Caffey did disturb me a little. I ordered a thorough reexamination, and was left with some puzzling conclusions at the apparent absence of tumorous growth, malignant or otherwise.

Sara was enduring most of the classic symptoms of typical pregnancy, and was enjoying Dr. Sansome's treatment hugely. She guzzled the alkaline-producing fruit juices, fortified with carefully rationed dribbles of gin. She nibbled contentedly at the sweets which the Frenchman supplied anonymously. And she raised merry hell because we refused to operate.

After two weeks, she threatened to leave. I was paged over the P. A. and got to her room in time to catch her trying to zip up her skirt.

She looked at me impatiently, and then back to her abdomen. "Damned thing's getting out of hand."

She had on an expensive tweed suit, and the smart, powder-blue cashmere coat I helped her into made her look her role of distinguished world traveler, syndicated columnist and woman of parts.

She hunched her shoulders forward slightly, so the loose folds of the

coat concealed her protruding middle.

"Thanks," she said casually. "I'll write you a check and be on my way."

"Dr. Sansome will be disappointed," I said casually.

"You heard from him?" she asked with interest.

I nodded.

She put her hands on her hips. "And you still persist with your fatuous idea that I'm going to have a baby?"

"Let us say," I evaded, "that we have adopted Dr. Sansome's treatment on a wait-and-see basis. You said yourself that he refused to operate. We have definitely confirmed that much. Your condition is still inoperable, but you are coming along fine."

"Well, now, why didn't you tell me that before." She threw off her coat and relieved the pressure of her waist zipper with a grateful sigh. "Now you're making sense. Send out for another Spillane. I'll go along with that. But no more of this drivel about transferring me to the maternity ward, see?"

Ten nights later, she changed her mind. I passed her room after a late emergency case. The door was open and I heard her crying softly to herself. I stopped in. Her bed lamp was on, and for a change she looked all woman.

I felt her pulse and asked, "What's the matter, Sara?"

"I'm going to have a baby!" she sobbed. "I've been feeling something peculiar for some time. But tonight it kicked the hell out of me."

"Want to talk about it?" I asked, still holding her wrist.

She looked at me with genuine bafflement in her eyes. Her face was puckered up like a hurt child's. "But it's so impossible, doctor. I'm sorry I talked to you the way I have, but so help me, I'm a good girl."

I almost said, *Well, these things happen*, but that would have sounded pretty silly. It was evident that she still wouldn't admit even to herself how and when it had happened.

"Ever go on a good binge?" I suggested.

"Not since I was sixteen," she exclaimed. "But I could use one right now. No, that might hurt the baby." She folded her arms protectively around her middle. "I don't get it. I don't get it at all. But if that's the way it is—" A crooked, pleased smile wrinkled tears from her cheeks. "Leave it to Sary to do things the unusual way."

She looked up at me. "Did you know I was the first white woman to

interview a Rajah's harem eunuch?"

"Looks like you have a real story this time," I said, playing along with her.

"Yeah. But who in hell will write it?"

Phillipe Sansome made himself eminently useful. He assisted in surgery every morning, refusing fees and pleading with everyone to maintain his anonymity. The staff was in on the conspiracy, and the nurses smiled indulgently at him behind his back. But Sansome was too great a man to ridicule. The general feeling was the same as mine. He was older than he thought, not in body, but in over-tired nerves and exhausted mind. None contested his skill with the scalpel; but none gave ten cents worth of credence to his twist on the theory of evolution.

As Sara's confinement proceeded with precise conformity to my expectations, I thought Sansome would lose heart—but he didn't. He arranged to be present in the delivery room with as much interest as if we expected a breach birth of a two-headed panda.

I was unfortunately called to Baltimore at the last minute. I flew both ways, but my haste was in vain. Sara gave birth while I was still aloft.

I checked in with more excitement than I'd thought possible. I asked at the desk, "How's Caffey?"

"Fine. Gave birth an hour ago. Beautiful little girl—"

I didn't wait for more. I dashed upstairs to the maternity ward, where Sara had finally consented to be moved, and slipped into her room.

She was tired, but conscious. She smiled at me peculiarly.

"So it's a girl!" I exclaimed. "Wait until I see Sansome. A beautiful, healthy, normal baby!"

A hand tapped me softly on the shoulder, and I turned to look into Sansome's triumphant eyes.

"Without a navel," he said.

—WINSTON MARKS

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Maida's Little Shop, *Inez Haynes Irwin*

This is the tale of Maida Westabrook, the motherless daughter of Jerome "Buffalo" Westabrook, Wall Street tycoon. Although Maida has had everything that money can buy and the devotion of her father, she has also known trouble and heartache.

First Love, *Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev*

Vladimir Petrovich Voldemar, a 16-year-old, is staying in the country with his family and meets Zinaida Alexandrovna Zasyekina, a beautiful 21-year-old woman, staying with her mother, Princess Zasyekina, in a wing of the manor. This family, as with many of the Russian minor nobility with royal ties of that time, were only afforded a degree of respectability because of their titles; the Zasyekins, in the case of this story, are a very poor family. The young Vladimir falls irretrievably in love with Zinaida, who has a set of several other (socially more eligible) suitors whom he joins in their difficult and often fruitless search for the young lady's favour.

The Republic, *Plato*

The Republic is a Socratic dialogue by Plato, written in approximately 380 BC. It is one of the most influential works of philosophy and political theory, and Plato's best known work. In Plato's fictional dialogues the characters of Socrates as well as various Athenians and foreigners discuss the meaning of justice and examine whether the just man is happier than the unjust man by imagining a society ruled by philosopher-kings and the guardians. The dialogue also discusses the role of the philosopher, Plato's Theory of Forms, the place of poetry, and the immortality of the soul.

Moonfleet, *John Meade Falkner*

Moonfleet is a tale of smuggling by the English novelist J. Meade Falkner, first published in 1898. The book was extremely popular among children worldwide up until the 1970s, mostly for its themes of adventure and gripping storyline. It remains a popular story widely read and is still sometimes studied in schools.
The novel is set in a fishing village in Dorset during the mid 18th century. The story concerns a 15 year old orphan boy, John Trenchard, who becomes friends with an older man who turns out to be the leader of a gang of smugglers.

Candide, *Voltaire*

Candide, ou l'Optimisme (1759) is a French satire by the Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire, English translations of which have been titled Candide: Or, All for the Best (1759); Candide: Or, The Optimist (1762); and Candide: Or, Optimism (1947). The novella begins with a young man, Candide, who is living a sheltered life in an Edenic paradise and being indoctrinated with Leibnizian optimism (or simply optimism) by his tutor, Pangloss. The work describes the abrupt cessation of this existence, followed by Candide's slow, painful disillusionment as he witnesses and experiences great hardships in the world. Voltaire concludes with Candide, if not outright rejecting optimism, advocating an enigmatic precept, "we must cultivate our garden", in lieu of the Leibnizian mantra of Pangloss, "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds".

Wuthering Heights, *Emily Brontë*

Wuthering Heights is Emily Brontë's only novel. It was first published in 1847 under the pseudonym Ellis Bell, and a posthumous second edition was edited by her sister Charlotte. The name of the novel comes from the Yorkshire manor on the moors on which the story centres (as an adjective, wuthering is a Yorkshire word referring to turbulent weather). The narrative tells the tale of the all-encompassing and passionate, yet thwarted, love between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw, and how this unresolved passion eventually destroys them and many around them.

Crime and Punishment, *Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky*

The poverty-stricken Raskolnikov, believing he is exempt from moral law, murders a man only to face the consequences not only from society but from his conscience, in this seminal story of justice, morality, and redemption from one of Russia's greatest novelists.

The Way of All Flesh, *Samuel Butler*

A semi-autobiographical novel that attacks Victorian era hypocrisy as it traces four generations of the Pontifex family. Butler dared not publish it during his lifetime, but when it was published, it was accepted as part of the general revulsion against Victorianism.

Robinson Crusoe, *Daniel Defoe*

The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (of

York, Mariner Who lived Eight and Twenty Years all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, where in all the Men perished but Himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pyrates) is a novel by Daniel Defoe, first published in 1719 and sometimes regarded as the first novel in English. The book is a fictional autobiography of the title character, an English castaway who spends 28 years on a remote tropical island near Venezuela, encountering Native Americans, captives, and mutineers before being rescued. This device, presenting an account of supposedly factual events, is known as a "false document" and gives a realistic frame story.

Pride and Prejudice, *Jane Austen*

Pride And Prejudice, the story of Mrs. Bennet's attempts to marry off her five daughters is one of the best-loved and most enduring classics in English literature. Excitement fizzes through the Bennet household at Longbourn in Hertfordshire when young, eligible Mr. Charles Bingley rents the fine house nearby. He may have sisters, but he also has male friends, and one of these—the haughty, and even wealthier, Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy—irks the vivacious Elizabeth Bennet, the second of the Bennet girls. She annoys him. Which is how we know they must one day marry. The romantic clash between the opinionated Elizabeth and Darcy is a splendid rendition of civilized sparring. As the characters dance a delicate quadrille of flirtation and intrigue, Jane Austen's radiantly caustic wit and keen observation sparkle.

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